

Plain English for Law Enforcement Communications in the Washington Metropolitan Area

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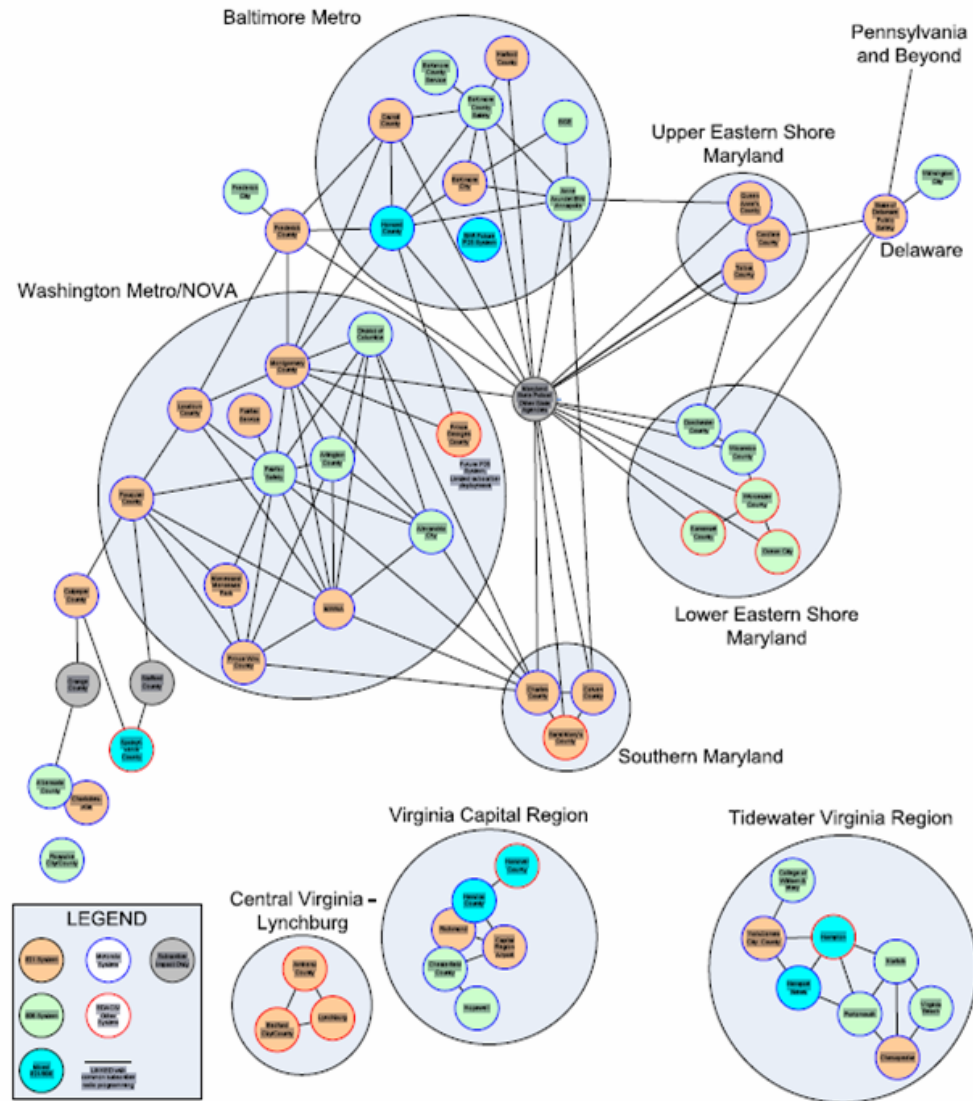
Montgomery County, MD Police Department

The Environment

- The Washington, D.C. area has a dense concentration of 800-MHz Motorola trunked radio systems.
- Neighboring jurisdictions directly program their subscribers with mutual aid radio resources.
- There is a complex web of interconnected radio systems.

The MD/DC/VA/DE 800 MHz Interoperability Web

Maryland–Washington, DC–Virginia–Delaware 800 MHz Voice Radio Interoperability Web



Project History

- The Metropolitan Washington Council of Governments Police Communications Subcommittee
 - Existing protocols and agreements mandated the use of plain speech when involved in mutual aid communications
 - Subcommittee debated whether it was realistic to expect the existing policy to be successfully implemented under stress

MWCOG Police Communications Subcommittee

- Discussion tended to focus on 'national security' events rather than everyday cross-agency interaction
- Some believed that the continued use of codes was not a problem because police would not use codes for the types of communications that would be needed in such a major event

Overlapping Jurisdictions

- State Police agencies use different codes than some local agencies
 - In some cases they are separated by different radio technology
 - In others they share a single radio system but use different codes
- Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority Police
- U.S. Park Police

Beyond 10-codes

- The discussion was expanded to include radio language other than 10-codes
 - Abbreviations, acronyms
 - Response codes

Data Collection

- Survey of agencies revealed little commonality among existing 10-codes

Original Proposal

- The subcommittee considered 3 options
 - Status Quo
 - All plain speech
 - A limited set of standardized L.E. codes
- The 3rd option was approved by a majority of the subcommittee and the Police Chiefs committee endorsed moving forward with this approach.

The result: "12" codes

- A working group considered the difficulty in transitioning agencies from one set of codes to another and the potential for miscommunications resulting for different meanings of old & new codes
- The result was the development of a list of codes with a "12" prefix to differentiate them from any codes in use in the region.

Final Result

- The proposal for standardized codes was abandoned when a major regional agency head opposed the re-training of that agency's personnel
- As a result the project was re-worked as a non-binding proposal recommending all agencies adopt plain speech radio protocols

Montgomery County, MD

- The Montgomery County, MD Police Department has an 800 MHz radio system with direct access to neighboring jurisdictions:
 - MD- Howard County, Carroll County, Frederick County
 - DC- Metropolitan Police
 - VA- Alexandria, Arlington County, Fairfax County, MWAA

Montgomery County, MD

- Maryland State Police Rockville barracks are users of the Montgomery County radio system
- Montgomery County Police and several allied municipal agencies use a set of radio codes related to, but distinct from, most variations of the APCO code list
- Prince George's County, MD (not 800 MHz) uses a separate distinct set of codes
- Some users have P.G. County radios for direct communications

Montgomery County, MD

- Committee formed including field personnel, dispatch personnel
- Reviewed existing codes and pared list down to those deemed essential
- Result was a reduction from 31 10-codes and 24 other 'status' codes to 4 codes.
 - 3 unique codes retained
 - 1 new code adopted (officer in trouble)

Montgomery County, MD

- In addition to eliminating codes
 - Rules were adopted prohibiting the use of report clearance codes in dispatching call types or classifying lookouts
 - Race codes for lookouts and NCIC checks were restricted to plain speech NCIC race codes with other plain speech descriptors as appropriate

Reaction

- Bureaucratic foul-up makes it hard to judge initial reception by the field
- There was an immediate reaction calling for reversal that quickly subsided.

Enforcement

- Enforcement of plain speech policies will continue to be an issue



QUESTIONS?